



**DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
BARRETT 4WD TRAIL RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT
US FOREST SERVICE
ELDORADO NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE
PACIFIC RANGER DISTRICT
EL DORADO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Barrett 4wd Trail Reconstruction Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement Alternative 1, under which we will reconstruct three segments of the Barrett Lake 4wd Trail (16E21) that have been found to be affecting the hydrologic connectivity of meadows 16E21-1, 16E21-5 and 16E21-6 respectively. (See EA pages 2 – 8)

Barrett Lake 4wd Trail at Meadow 16E21-1:

The proposed action for Meadow 16E21-1 is to construct approximately two rolling dips in the trail to slow and divert water off of the trail before it reaches the meadow. An existing sediment plume in the meadow would be removed using hand tools and wheelbarrows, and the area vegetated as needed by seed and/or planting plugs of native meadow species. Excess material may be used in other trail repairs in the Proposed Action.

Barrett Lake 4wd Trail at Meadow 16E21-5:

A short reroute of the Barrett Lake 4wd Trail around the east side of Meadow 16E21-5 is proposed. The proposed reroute is approximately 0.27 miles in length. The new segment would be constructed to a similar standard as the rest of the trail (TC2- Four Wheel Drive Trail > 72", native material with limited grading.). Traveling from south to north, the reroute would depart the existing trail before it drops into the meadow. There would be some grading and tree removal required. The number of trees greater than 15" diameter breast height to be removed is estimated at 4 to 8. There is one crossing of an ephemeral stream. The channel at that point is primarily lined with rock, however some armoring of the channel approach and departure (using linked permeable concrete pavers over drain rock or riprap.) The proposed reroute ties back into the existing trail just north of the meadow.

The original portion of the trail in the meadow would be restored by removing the existing log structure and culvert, scarifying the trail and revegetated using a combination of locally collected transplants and native seeds. Where necessary to restore natural drainage, the trail would be re-graded to allow water to cross to the other side.

Barrett Lake 4wd Trail at Meadow 16E21-6

A number of potential reroutes around Meadow 16E21-6 were explored, however each of them had other resource impacts that were of concern. Therefore, the proposed action for meadow 16E21-6 is to reconstruct several sections of the trail segment in place.

Rolling dips would be constructed on both the south and north trail approaches to the meadow to divert water now running down the trail. One rolling dip would be constructed on the north end, and several on the south end.

The three ephemeral stream channel crossings located on the trail within the meadow would be stabilized by regrading and hardening with materials such as linked permeable concrete pavers over drain rock, riprap or french drains constructed with geotextile and drain rock, enhancing the subsurface flow of water and promoting hydrologic connectivity of the meadow.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT

The Barrett Lake 4wd Trail is a popular off-highway vehicle route located on the Eldorado National Forest that has been utilized by recreationists since at least the 1960's. It is also located within the Pyramid Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). The location of the project is north of Wrights Lake on the Pacific Ranger District, Eldorado National Forest, T 12N, R16 E, Sections 8, 17 and 29 (refer to the map in the EA, page 4). Staging areas for helicopter loading will be located at one or more of four nearby clearings adjacent to Forest Road 11N39 or Wrights Lake Road (refer to the map in the EA, Appendix E.)

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.**
Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action. The proposed action will have beneficial effects to hydrology by bringing the Barrett 4wd Trail into compliance with Standard & Guideline #100 at three meadows. There would be approximately 0.06 acres of ground disturbance in the RCA's surrounding Meadows 16E21 and 16E26, and approximately 0.08 acres of disturbance at an ephemeral stream channel and its associated RCA as a result of the construction of the reroute around meadow 16E21-5. There would be approximately 0.2 acres of temporary ground disturbance in Meadow 16E21-5 as a result of actions to rehabilitate the meadow. The project will not affect the Sierra Nevada Yellow-legged frog or its habitat. It will not affect threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife or botanical species, and is expected to result in overall benefits to important wildlife habitats within the project area through improvement of meadow vegetation. (See EA pages 10-19)
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because the trail improvements and reroute would be designed and constructed to Region 5 Forest Service standards. The improvements and reroute are not expected to change the level or type of use by the public (See EA page 19.) In addition, design criteria have been incorporated to address helicopter operations and public safety during project construction. (See EA page 7)
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. The project includes work at three small high elevation meadows. The focus of the project is to reduce impacts of the Barrett 4wd Trail on those meadows and improve hydrologic connectivity in the meadows. The project is expected to have a beneficial effect on meadow resources. The project is also located within the Pyramid Inventories Roadless area (IRA). The Barrett Lake 4wd Trail was an established use at the time the IRA was delineated and the proposed project is not expected to change the characteristics of the area. The proposed project is not in proximity to any parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, ecologically critical areas, or other wetlands, therefore none would be impacted. (See EA pages 20–21)
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. (See EA page 21)

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risks. The proposed action is similar in type and scope to many projects on the Eldorado National Forest. Effects from this type of project are well known to the interdisciplinary team members. (See EA page 21)
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The Barrett 4wd Trail Reconstruction project does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects because no significant effects have been identified for this project. Other routes found in the 2013 Travel Management SEIS to be impacting meadows will be analyzed in the future based on resource conditions unique to those projects and geographic locations. The project does not change the character of the Pyramid Inventories Roadless Area, and would not preclude any future actions related to the IRA. The project does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration, because the scope of the analysis for the 18 routes was already established and focused by two previous EIS's and a Federal District Court Order. This EA is tiered to the 2013 Eldorado National Forest Travel Management SEIS.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The effects of the Barrett 4wd Reconstruction project are limited to the local area, and there are no other effects that would be additive to the effects of the proposed action to create a cumulatively significant impact. Biological Evaluations prepared for this project considered potential cumulative impacts of the proposal on habitat for wildlife and plants. These documents support the finding that this proposal would not cause significant cumulative effects on biological resources, even when considered in relation to other actions, and would result in overall benefits to important wildlife habitats within the project area. The proposal does not change the risk of cumulative watershed effects (CWE) in the two HUC 7 watersheds because the amount of ground disturbance is negligible. (See EA pages 21-23)
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific cultural or historical resources. The project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in accordance with provisions of the Region 5 Programmatic Agreement. (See EA page 23)

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** Biological Assessment/Evaluations were prepared for wildlife, aquatic and botanical species listed or proposed for listing as threatened or endangered. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. (See EA pages 23–24)
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA pages 10-24). The action is consistent with the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1989) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (2004). Discussion in the EA of effects and the related references in the project file document that this project will not adversely affect soils, water quality, or threatened or endangered species. (See EA page 10-24)

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

DECISION RATIONALE

The purpose of this project is to analyze and implement corrective actions for the Barrett Lake 4wd Trail to comply with the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Riparian Conservation Objectives Standard and Guideline 100 as it pertains to meadows in the Eldorado National Forest.

Standard and Guideline 100 reads,

“Maintain and restore the hydrologic connectivity of streams, meadows, wetlands and other special aquatic features identifying roads and trails that intercept, divert or disrupt natural surface and subsurface water flow paths. Implement corrective actions where necessary to restore connectivity.”

It is my determination that Alternative 1, the Proposed Action, best meets this purpose and need.

- Alternative 1 will result in implementation of corrective actions for the Barrett Lake 4wd Trail to comply with Standard and Guideline #100 as it pertains to meadows in the Eldorado National Forest. Choosing Alternative #2, (No Action), would not result in corrective actions on the ground, and current issues with hydrologic connectivity at

those meadows would persist.

- The Barrett 4wd Trail was one of the 42 routes considered in the 2013 Eldorado National Forest Travel Management SEIS, and this Environmental Assessment is part of the implementation of and tiered to that SEIS. I attended meetings and open houses with a variety of individuals, groups and elected officials during the preparation of the SEIS, and heard both an overwhelming desire to retain the unique recreation opportunities these high elevation routes offer as well as a desire to restore the impacted meadows. My decision on the Barrett 4wd Trail Reconstruction project addresses both of those desires expressed by the public, and reflects my shared commitment documented by the Forest Supervisor in her 2013 Record of Decision for the Eldorado National Forest Travel Management SEIS to complete the corrective actions for the 18 routes that were closed so that the routes can be added back onto the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) for public motor vehicle use.
- The focused purpose and need of the Barrett 4wd Trail Reconstruction project is appropriate given that it is not the first look at this route. The scope of this current EA has already been established and focused by the analysis and decision already made in the 2008 Travel Management FEIS and ROD and the 2013 Travel Management SEIS and ROD as well as a Federal District Court order.
- The range of alternatives considered is also adequate given this focus. Additional alternatives for the Barrett Trail were explored previously in the 2013 Travel Management SEIS, and additional alternatives for addressing the meadows are documented in the section of this EA on Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from detailed study. (See EA, pages 8-9)
- There will be some short term direct impacts related to ground disturbance during implementation of this project; however there is a long-term net benefit of improving hydrologic connectivity at the three meadows. The project complies with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended in accordance with provisions of the Region 5 Programmatic Agreement. The project will not affect threatened, endangered or sensitive wildlife or botanical species, and is expected to result in overall benefits to important wildlife habitats within the project area through improvement of meadow vegetation. The project does not change the character of the Pyramid Inventoried Roadless Area. Design Criteria have been incorporated into the project for protection of important resources.
- The public comments received during the scoping period and Preliminary Environmental Assessment review period for this project indicated that the level of controversy over the Barrett Trail is relatively low, that there is a desire by the public that the needed repairs to the trail be implemented in a timely manner, and that

volunteers are interested in assisting with implementation. Concerns were also expressed about maintenance on the remaining portions of the trail. Maintenance will continue to be done on the remainder of the Barrett 4wd Trail on an ongoing basis under existing and future trail maintenance projects that are distinct and unrelated to this EA. I expect to have staff out looking at maintenance needs on this trail in the field season of 2014.

The Barrett 4WD Trail EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Eldorado National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal. A scoping letter and description of the proposed action was sent to interested parties including all appellants of the 2013 Eldorado National Forest Travel Management SEIS, Eldorado, Amador and Alpine Counties, and representatives of local tribes on December 13, 2013, with comments requested by Jan 17, 2014. Seven letters were received with comments on the proposed action.

The Preliminary Environmental Assessment was released March 7, and a letter sent to interested parties including persons who provided scoping comments, all appellants of the 2013 Eldorado National Forest Travel Management SEIS, Eldorado, Amador and Alpine Counties, and representatives of local tribes on December 13, 2013, with comments requested by April 7, 2014. Two letters were received with comments on the Preliminary Environmental Assessment. A list of persons who provided comments during the review period is included in Appendix B of the EA, and a summary of the comments received and how they are being addressed is included in the Appendix A of the EA.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Eldorado National Forest Land Management Plan as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision, January 2004 (SNFPA).

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.



ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

Administrative Review: The administrative review period closed on June 9, 2014. No objections pursuant to 36 CFR 218 were filed.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

When no objection is filed within the objection filing period: (2) Approval of the proposed project or activity documented in a DN may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Diana Erickson, Eldorado National Forest, 100 Forni Road; Placerville, CA 95667, phone number (530) 621-5214.

Richard Thornburgh

District Ranger

June 16, 2014

Date

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